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Listening to survive: Classical music and conflict in the musico-literary novel

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Abstract

This article addresses the possibility that Western classical music might be used as a source of hope for a post-conflict future by considering a literary depiction of music and conflict resolution. As a case study, Steven Galloway's *The Cellist of Sarajevo* is identified as a “musico-literary novel,” and established within the framework of Stephen Benson’s “literary music” and Hazel Smith’s methodological development of musico-literary studies through extended interdisciplinarity. The novel features three Sarajevan citizens who hear a cellist play in the rubble-strewn streets, and their music-listening experiences motivate them to work toward a post-conflict future. To consider the potential insights and blind spots surrounding ideas about music’s potential power in this narrative, the soundscape of the novel is identified to establish the significance of sound, music, and active listening in the text; parallels are highlighted between the ending of *The Cellist of Sarajevo* and Michael Walzer’s *Just and Unjust Wars*, revealing music as an active moral force; and similarities between Galloway’s novel and Craig Robertson’s “Music and conflict transformation in Bosnia” are illustrated, demonstrating how interdisciplinary analysis of a musico-literary novel can offer a valid contribution to discussions surrounding the use of music to exit violence.

Keywords

Cellist of Sarajevo, contemporary literature, just war, literary music, music and conflict resolution, musico-literary, soundscape, word and music studies

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The absence of shelling is almost like music.

(Galloway, 2009)

Introduction

The Cellist of Sarajevo by Steven Galloway (2009) is a fictional exploration of how conflict resolution might be aided by music. Set during the siege of Sarajevo (1992–1996), the novel revolves around three Sarajevan citizens, exploring their listening experiences of hearing a cellist perform in the rubble-strewn streets.¹ While the image of a man playing the cello in a city under siege might seem a grossly over-romantic rendering of war, Galloway was inspired to write *The Cellist of Sarajevo* by historical events: in 1992, Vedran Smailović played Albinoni's *Adagio* on 22 consecutive days, in memory of 22 people who died in an explosion while queuing for bread. The event made international news at the time, capturing the world's attention, and inspiring multiple creative outputs, including Galloway's novel, even though Galloway does not have any connection to Sarajevo.² The novel, through its depiction of the complexity of personal listening experiences, is what I term a "musico-literary novel." Using *The Cellist of Sarajevo* as a case study, and building on the interdisciplinary approach to musico-literary studies as proposed by Hazel Smith (2016), I will illustrate how analysis of the musico-literary novel can make a significant contribution to discussions around the use of music to exit violence and reach post-conflict settings.

First published in 2008, *The Cellist of Sarajevo* was shortlisted for multiple prizes, lauded as "the work of an expert, [. . .] a controlled and subtle piece of craftsmanship" (Green, 2008). Little critical literature has been written on the novel, primarily due to its relatively recent publication date.³ When it was published, Vedran Smailović, the real "cellist of Sarajevo," noted his anger at finding himself being used in the narrative, although Galloway argued that what Smailović did was a public act, and therefore open for writers to use in fiction (Sharrock, 2008). Galloway himself has no primary connection to Sarajevo and he did not experience the siege. However, Malcolm Brabant, a war correspondent who worked for the *BBC* in Sarajevo during the siege and met Smailović, voiced a positive opinion of Galloway's ability to capture the reality of the siege: "Personally, I thought the book captured the mood of Sarajevo. And that was pretty spectacular considering the author wasn't there at the time" (Brabant, 2019, personal communication).⁴ Galloway's novel does not follow an accurate historical timeline, and he makes no explicit mention of the political situation in Sarajevo.⁵ Regarding his creation of the fictional cellist, Galloway (2008) stated in an interview that, when writing, he

didn't seek him out, because the characters are spending a fair amount of time [. . .] speculating as to the motives of the cellist [. . .]. I wanted to be as blind as they would have been, in terms of any sort of concrete answers.

Given this, there is only one short, prologue-style chapter written from the cellist's perspective. The narrative then alternates between the perspectives of three characters caught in the Sarajevan conflict: Arrow, a 28-year-old woman and morally concerned sniper fighting for the city;⁶ Kenan, a middle-aged husband and father whose priority is collecting water for his family; and Dragan, a 64-year-old man who spends the entirety

of the narrative trying to cross a sniper-guarded intersection. As these characters move around the city, we experience not only Galloway's imagining of what it might have been like to hear and see the cellist's performance amid the sounds and sights of warfare, but also the potential impact of that listening experience.

The study of music in literature is wide-ranging in its approach. Werner Wolf (1999: 55–57, 231–232) theorizes the use of music to structure literature but dismisses the importance of explicit thematization on its own;⁷ Emily Petermann (2014) then develops this approach, defining “the musical novel” as “musical not primarily in terms of its content, but in its very form” (p. 2). The study of the thematic use of music in fiction is thus a much-needed recent development, and in contrast to Petermann's “musical novel,” I have identified what I term the “musico-literary novel”: a novel which thematically engages with musicological and music philosophy concerns throughout its narrative.⁸ The musico-literary novel, of which *The Cellist of Sarajevo* is one such example, requires an interdisciplinary analytical approach.⁹ Stephen Benson (2006) defines musico-literary studies as when “musicology is newly attentive to literature and literary studies is newly cognizant of musicology,” coining the term “literary music”: a “music made by the narrative in which it occurs,” which “allows us to see, literally and literarily, [. . .] how and why music continues to be valued so highly” (p. 4). Benson's “literary music” refers more explicitly to an instance in the text, and not necessarily the text as a whole, hence my introduction of the term “musico-literary novel.” My methodology is built on Benson's work, but developed further by using Smith's (2016) methodological development of Benson's understanding of musico-literary studies, which uses “a broad spectrum of disciplines to augment the scope of the analysis” (p. 7). Thus, the present analysis of *The Cellist of Sarajevo* uses an ethnomusicological study of music and conflict transformation in Sarajevo (Robertson, 2010), and Michael Walzer's (2015) just war theory which looks toward a post-conflict future, to demonstrate how *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, as a musico-literary novel, can engage with additional disciplines, allowing us to see how and why music is valued within a conflict context, and consider whether it can aid discussions around post-conflict futures.

John Paul Lederach (2003, 2016) emphasizes the importance, in the term “conflict transformation,” of implementing change in conflict situations, rather than resolution. The study of the use of music in conflict transformation rapidly developed in the late-20th century, and continues into the 21st century, as scholars interrogate the previously under-studied details of how music might be used in conflict transformation. To note a few key studies: Arild Bergh (2007: 141, 151) questions the practical achievements and limitations “of using music project participation as a conflict transformation tool,” highlighting the danger of putting music “on a pedestal”; Olivier Urbain (2008) collates diverse studies considering music as a tool for reconciliation, resistance, therapy, and also, conversely, as unpeaceful; Urbain and Craig Robertson (2015) collate chapters exploring musical activity and power, primarily focusing on the political upheavals of the Arab Spring; Robertson (2016) builds on Robertson (2010), discussed later, arguing for musical ethnography as part of peacebuilding activities; Robertson (2015) interrogates the reality of music's potential to unite people; Robertson (2018) again explores music as a metaphor for conflict transformation.¹⁰ These studies balance the effectiveness of music with its limitations, noting the importance of creativity, but also the difficulty of communicating the experience of music in conflict transformation situations from an empirical ethnomusicological approach, and each study ends by calling for further investigations which use tools from across the various disciplines.

The discussion below includes the following three sections: first, I identify the novel's soundscape, establishing the significance of sound and music when considering *The Cellist of Sarajevo* as a musico-literary novel. Second, I reveal the limits surrounding the narrative when describing a post-conflict future by comparing the endings of *The Cellist of Sarajevo* and Walzer's (2015) theoretical proposition for nonviolent defense in the move to a post-conflict future. Third, I highlight the similarities between Galloway's novel and an ethnomusicological study of a Sarajevo inter-religious choir (Robertson, 2010). Ultimately, I will highlight not only the issues with fictional representations of music in conflict but also the insights these representations can provide, demonstrating how interdisciplinary analysis of a musico-literary novel can offer a valid contribution to discussions surrounding the use of music to exit violence.

The soundscape of *The Cellist of Sarajevo*

To understand the impact of the cellist's performance on Sarajevo citizens, we must have an understanding of the aural experience of living in a city under siege. While the novel is a silent medium compared to film or television, Galloway creates a soundscape for the novel like those identified by Stephen Adams (1989), David Toop (2011), and Christin Hoene (2016), and Galloway extends this theme of sound perception to our experience of music alongside warfare, as we as readers never hear the sound of the cellist's music, nor do we hear it as it is perceived, but instead read what that listening experience is like, separating us further from the "original" sound.¹¹

A clear example of the soundscape is Galloway's use of "earwitness accounts," Raymond Murray Schafer's term for the "aural illusion" of warfare demonstrated through literary means, such as in Erich Maria Remarque's (1929) *All Quiet on the Western Front*: "As the shells were travelling at super-sonic speeds they arrived in advance of the sounds of their original detonations" (Schafer, 1994: 8–9). In *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, sound is described as it is perceived, rather than as it is created, which leads to delays in perception, as well as emphasizing the fact that, when living in a city under siege, characters have only their (not always reliable) senses to rely upon for survival. Like Schafer's earwitness account, *The Cellist of Sarajevo* distances sight from sound, relying on the fact that light travels faster than sound, which creates a disconnected effect and places the reader within the perception of the character. For example, the novel begins with the sound of warfare and a city besieged: "It screamed downward, splitting air and sky without effort. [. . .] There was a moment before impact that was the last instant of things as they were. Then the visible world exploded" (Galloway, 2009: 1).¹² These opening lines set up the perceptual delays experienced by the characters, and not only are sight and sound disconnected, but related sounds are distanced, reversed, or separated: "[S]he [Arrow] hears a rifle fire, but doesn't hear the bullet strike" (Galloway, 2009: 14); "He [Dragan] feels the shot an instant before he hears it. There is a sharp zip, a rush of air as a bullet snaps past his left ear, then the harsh blast of a gun" (Galloway, 2009: 79); "Emina is thrown to the side with a violent surge, and the sound of gunfire punches through silence" (Galloway, 2009: 116). There is a shared belief among the citizens of Sarajevo that "you never hear the shell that kills you" (Galloway, 2009: 138), and sound becomes paramount to survival: "He [Dragan] heard the bullet, and that means the sniper

missed” (Galloway, 2009: 79). The disconnect between sight and sound also refers to the unknown sources, and dangers, of sounds: before a shot is fired, a citizen cannot know whether there is a sniper watching a road they are trying to cross, and if a shot is fired, there is no clear way to pinpoint it. Similarly, if there is no shot fired, that does not mean there is not a sniper watching: Kenan will “never know whether it was because someone chose not to shoot him or if no one saw him at all. This bothers him, this lack of information” (Galloway, 2009: 145). The unsettling fear produced by uncertain sources of sound speaks to Toop’s (2011: ix) work on mediumship: “[S]ound without apparent source” produces the “anxiety of awareness, of knowing that sounds should have a cause.”

Once the soundscape of the siege has been created, we are presented with the cellist, first seen through Arrow’s eyes, and a description of the music-listening experience. Unlike the sounds of conflict, which come from an unsighted source, the sight and sound of the cellist are connected. First, we see the cellist:

a tall man with turbulent black hair [. . .]. He walks out of the building with a calm and determined stride, appearing oblivious to the danger he’s putting himself in, sets his stool in the middle of the street, sits down and positions his instrument. (Galloway, 2009: 63)

At first sight, Arrow “isn’t sure whether to trust what she sees” (Galloway, 2009: 62), akin to the perceptual difficulties of warfare noted earlier. However, she soon accepts it, and then the cellist begins to play:

His arms rise, and his left hand grips the neck of the cello, his right guides the bow to its throat. It is the most beautiful thing she has ever seen. When the first notes sound they are, to her, inaudible. Sound has vanished from the world. (Galloway, 2009: 63)¹³

While we see the cellist through Arrow’s eyes, we do not hear him through her ears, because in Arrow’s listening experience, “sound vanished from the world.” This listening description fits Arrow’s experience; listening to the cellist removes her, temporarily, from the sound of warfare, the soundscape in which we have previously been submerged in the narrative. Thus, rather than describing the sound of the music as a character hears it, as in Benson’s “literary music,” Galloway describes the experience.¹⁴ Arrow “is no longer there,” instead lost in memories, both pleasant and horrific: “Her mother is lifting her up, spinning her round and laughing. [. . .] She slips on someone else’s blood [. . .] a boy she likes kisses her [. . .]. She exhales, and pulls the trigger” (Galloway, 2009: 63–64). The effect this listening experience has on Arrow is significant:

Then sound returns to the world. She isn’t sure what has happened. She doesn’t know what a man playing a cello in the street at four in the afternoon has done to her. You will not cry, she tells herself, and she wills herself calm. (Galloway, 2009: 64)

This first example of the music-listening experience demonstrates that we must understand Galloway’s use and interpretation of the power of music in the conflict context as focusing not on musical description, but on the effect of the listening experience on individuals. Galloway’s use of music is maintained in his description of Kenan’s first sighting of the cellist, where the focus is on what Kenan sees: “His tuxedo is dirty and

his shoes are scuffed. His hair is black and matted [. . .]. There are large dark circles under his eyes. The man looks like he's been in a fight, and he looks like he's lost" (Galloway, 2009: 181–182). While the cellist may look defeated, and Kenan questions the cellist's performance—"What could the man possibly hope to accomplish by playing music in the street?"—, this perception is changed when Kenan hears the cellist play and watches as "the building behind the cellist repairs itself. [. . .] Kenan watches as his city heals itself around him" (Galloway, 2009: 182). Galloway depicts both Kenan and Arrow as being transported out of the immediate visual experience of the conflict context, whether into past memories or future hopes, by the listening experience.

In Arrow's and Kenan's listening experiences, Galloway does not describe the music. Describing music within the literary text is difficult but possible, and it creates Benson's (2006) "literary music": "[A] music made, performed or staged in the course of the narration, a music which the narrative works to make present" (p. 10). The two examples above, however, make use of metaphor instead of describing the music itself: "sound vanished from the world" for Arrow, while Kenan "feels himself relax as the music seeps into him [. . .] its notes familiar and full of pride, a young boy in a new coat holding his father's hand as he walks down a winter street" (Galloway, 2009: 182). Although these metaphorical renditions of literary music do not perform the music itself, by linking personal memories to the music they follow Benson's (2006) assertion that "the singularity of the musical experience [. . .] [is] the germ of literary music" (p. 10). It is the singular listening experience which has a significant impact on how characters experience life during the siege, and this is where music's "power" lies.¹⁵ As the characters continue to listen, they form a relationship with the cellist, the music, and the situation. We must not forget that the context of this performance will affect the characters' response to the listening experience, but this does not mean their experience relies on extramusical forces alone. As Arrow listens each day while protecting the cellist, she

realises that she's beginning to know the notes he plays. She's able to hear them in her mind before she hears them with her ears, to fill in those that are drowned out by the street and the shells and her own concentration. (Galloway, 2008: 126)

Listening is active, not passive, as it "affords the listener opportunities for [. . .] the creation, consolidation and elaboration of meaning systems" (Bergh and DeNora, 2009: 106, 107). By listening, Arrow forms a personal connection to the music, and to her understanding of its meaning, informing our understanding of the music's value.¹⁶ Listening to music, in *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, thus becomes an active exploration of meaning.

Multiple aspects combine to create the "meaning" acquired by listening, including the characteristics and knowledge of the individual who is listening, the context of the listening experience, and the piece of music which is being listened to. The context of the siege and its related soundscape, as noted above, make the cellist's performance more surreal, and more impactful, as characters hear the tonal structures of classical music amid the chaotic noise of the siege. However, the piece itself, its sound and its history, is also significant. Albinoni's *Adagio* (Albinoni, 1958), also known as "Adagio

in G minor,” has a complicated history: first published in 1958, it was claimed to have been composed originally by the well-known Baroque composer Tomaso Albinoni (1671–1751), and then reconstructed from a fragment (which survived the bombing of the Dresden library) by Remo Giazotto, an Italian musicologist and critic, known for his romanticized biographies of baroque composers (Gianturco, 2001), including Albinoni (Giazotto, 1945). The claim that this *Adagio* was written by Albinoni is generally considered false today, particularly as the supposed Albinoni fragment has never been seen, and instead the *Adagio* is believed to be Giazotto’s composition. Despite, or perhaps because of, its murky history, the *Adagio* remains a popular classical work,¹⁷ and the opening pages of *The Cellist of Sarajevo* use this murkiness as the reason for the cellist’s choice to perform it:

[E]ven those who doubt its authenticity have difficulty denying the Adagio’s beauty. [. . .] That something could be almost erased from existence in the landscape of a ruined city, and then rebuilt until it is new and worthwhile, gives him hope. (Galloway, 2009: 1)¹⁸

The composition history, or legend, of Albinoni’s *Adagio* thus informs the “meaning” to be found in its thematic presence in the novel.¹⁹ However, the characters themselves do not know this history, as they do not recognize the piece when they hear it, which means that the composition history as told in the beginning of the novel affects the reader’s “listening” experience, but not the listeners themselves. Despite this, the characters are affected by their listening experience. By describing these listening experiences, Galloway establishes sound and music as significant elements of the narrative of *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, which we may therefore consider a musico-literary novel.

The Cellist of Sarajevo and just war theory

The previous section established the significance of the soundscape, and how listening to music is a subjective experience that becomes an active exploration of meaning. I now turn to the novel’s portrayal of the moral and ethical complexities of being caught in a war, which are linked, in the narrative, with characters’ “active” music-listening experiences. I focus primarily on Arrow, as her narrative contains numerous internal debates with herself about her moral situation within the Sarajevan conflict, and I briefly refer to the experiences of Dragan and Kenan, as all three characters’ narratives end with a significant moral shift in relation to the Sarajevan conflict. These endings are of significance, and I parallel my discussion of the ending of Galloway’s novel with the concluding arguments of Walzer’s (2015) influential treatise on moral philosophy and just war theory, *Just and Unjust Wars*, which proposes the use of nonviolent defense in war. Ultimately, these endings illuminate our understanding of the limits of the narrative which imagines a post-conflict future when relying on music.

Arrow’s narrative primarily consists of internal moral debates which resonate strongly with concerns in just war theory, as she is preoccupied with justifying her actions as a sniper. For example, she does not shoot civilians, only soldiers: “‘That man’s a civilian,’ she says. ‘He’s no soldier’” (Galloway, 2009: 194). She uses a different name so as to distance herself from her younger, pre-siege, pre-sniper self:

Using her real name would make her no different from the men she kills. It would be a death greater than the end of her life [. . .]. From the first time she picked up a rifle to kill she has called herself Arrow. (Galloway, 2009: 10)

Arrow is concerned with maintaining control of her moral choices in a limited, besieged world, but when confronted with the cellist and his performance, Arrow begins to question herself and her situation:

The cellist confuses her. She doesn't know what he hopes to achieve with his playing. He can't believe he will stop the war. He can't believe he will save lives. Perhaps he has gone insane, but she doesn't think so. [. . .] The cellist doesn't strike her as a man who has lost his will to live. He appears to care about the quality of his life. (Galloway, 2009: 84)

The cellist's musical performance becomes a moral touchstone:

Does she think she is good because she kills bad men? Is she? Does it matter why she kills them? [. . .] She kills them because she hates them. Does the fact that she has good reason to hate them absolve her? A month ago she would have answered yes. Now she wonders who decides what is a good reason and what isn't. (Galloway, 2009: 166)

It is the cellist's performance, which has taken place in the last month, that has changed her thinking. Arrow's moral concerns align with key concerns in just war theory, as she grapples with the question of whether a war could ever be "just," and where the position of civilians and fighters fall in these moral debates. My concern is with Arrow's moral position by the end of the novel. After killing soldiers to protect the city, and indeed killing an enemy sniper whom she caught listening to the cellist, Arrow eventually arrives at a moment when she refuses to kill. She lays down her rifle and makes an active choice not to fight back when men come to her door to kill her; Arrow opts for a nonviolent statement in her actions, motivated by the cellist's own nonviolent public statement of performance.

The moral place that Arrow reaches is striking because it parallels the proposition put forward by Walzer (2015) concerning nonviolent self-defense. Walzer's book, first published in 1977 and now in its fifth edition, primarily outlines how one can define a war as just or unjust.²⁰ At the end of Walzer's (2015) *Just and Unjust Wars* is an afterword titled "Nonviolence and the theory of war." Walzer's afterword considers a (highly theoretical) path toward a post-conflict future, by re-evaluating the theory of war—an attempt which Walzer admits deserves a book in itself (2015: 329). Walzer (2015: 330) proposes that, instead of regarding civilian resistance as "a last resort," we could train civilians in methods of "nonviolent struggle" so that a country's first line of defense is not through military action, but by civilian resistance. Walzer's (2015) proposal is highly theoretical because, "when one wages a 'war without weapons,' one appeals for restraint from men with weapons," for example:

You cannot shoot at me, because I am not shooting at you; nor am I going to shoot at you. I am your enemy and will remain so as long as you occupy my country. But I am a noncombatant enemy, and you must coerce and control me, if you can, without violence. (p. 334)

Ultimately, war is political for Walzer (2015),²¹ and his argument for nonviolent defense relies on transforming war into a political struggle, a transformation which relies on “insisting upon the rules of war and by holding soldiers rigidly to the norms they set. The restraint of war is the beginning of peace” (p. 334). Walzer’s idea is innovative and compelling in the way it turns the priority of defense on its head, and if put into practice, would likely prove extremely difficult to fulfill. Yet, the first step in the direction toward nonviolent defense is what takes place at the end of *The Cellist of Sarajevo*.

Arrow is morally affected by her experience of listening to the cellist, resulting in a moral shift in her actions as she experiences two moral hesitations. Arrow’s first moral hesitation takes place when she spots the enemy sniper, whom she must kill to protect the cellist, but notices that he is listening and not shooting: “She wonders whether he can hear the music [. . .]. Does it sound the same to him? What does he hear? What does he think about this man who sits in the street and plays?” (Galloway, 2009: 132). Arrow hesitates: “[S]he is, at once, sure of two things. The first is that she does not want to kill this man, and the second is that she must” (Galloway, 2009: 133). Arrow briefly connects with the sniper on an individual level through the shared music-listening experience, but she maintains her duty to protect the cellist when the music stops and Arrow shoots: “The final notes of the cellist’s melody reach him [. . .] the back of his head disintegrates” (Galloway, 2009: 133). However, the doubt surrounding Arrow’s hesitation remains. When she is reassigned a new commander and ordered to shoot a civilian as part of the “cause,” her moral principle wins over duty this time, due to her memory of her listening experience: “She hears music, and, this time, she does not fire” (Galloway, 2009: 197).

Arrow disobeys direct orders, and, escapes, but she maintains her previous focus, to protect the cellist. When Arrow hears the cellist play for the final time, Galloway’s (2009) description of the music-listening experience changes, and this is the first time that musical notes are mentioned:

Arrow let the slow pulse of the vibrating strings flood into her: [. . .] Her eyes watered, and the notes ascended the scale. [. . .] They [the notes] told her that everything had happened exactly as she knew it had, and that nothing could be done about it. [. . .] But it could all have been stopped. It was possible. [. . .] The music demanded that she remember this, that she know to a certainty that the world still held the capacity for goodness. (pp. 220–221)

These changes in Galloway’s description mirror the changes in the narrative: as this moment marks the end of the cellist’s performances, it is therefore the end of Arrow’s job to protect him. However, this end represents a new moral beginning for Arrow, triggered by her active listening experience. Prompted by the cellist’s performance, which was not simply the sound of survival, but the sound of Walzer’s nonviolent resistance, Arrow moves toward her own act of nonviolent defense: purposefully not shooting the men who have come to kill her for disobeying orders. Maintaining the significance of the soundscape, the novel ends with Arrow awakening to the sound of footsteps outside her door; men have come to kill her, and “she wants them to know that she was armed and could have fought back” (Galloway, 2009: 222). Her moral concerns motivate her to maintain her right to choose: “Necessity will force her to hate her pursuers. And Arrow will not let that happen [. . .] no one will tell her who to hate” (Galloway, 2009: 222). Moreover,

combined with establishing her agency of choice, Arrow re-establishes her pre-sniper self, returning to the position of civilian rather than soldier, as she speaks the novel's final line: "My name is Alisa" (Galloway, 2009: 223). This is not simply a return to her pre-war self, however, as earlier in the novel Arrow explains that, by changing her name, "the person who fought and killed could someday be put away" (Galloway, 2009: 10). Thus, the ending of *The Cellist of Sarajevo* moves toward a post-, and not pre-, conflict setting, as Arrow/Alisa is motivated to act in nonviolent defense by the music-listening experience to "put away" her combat role.

A parallel is found in the narratives of Kenan and Dragan, who are both encouraged with new hope by the cellist's performance: "On his [Dragan's] way home he'll make a small detour [. . .] so he can tell Emina what happened on the last day the cellist played" (Galloway, 2009: 218); "Today's trip will be different, he [Kenan] knows. Today is the day the cellist will play for the twenty-second and final time" (Galloway, 2009: 209). Again, narrative change is occurring, as Dragan will "make a small detour," while Kenan's "trip will be different," and these changes are significant to these characters' narratives because they have been stuck in the repetitive actions required for survival: Kenan's entire storyline narrates his daily attempt to collect water, while Dragan narrates his attempt to cross an intersection, without getting killed, on his way to get food. Unlike Arrow, Kenan and Dragan are not involved in the fighting, but they are civilians who are given new motivations by the cellist's musical performance; they move to play their part in moving toward a post-conflict future for Sarajevo, and fulfill Walzer's proposition of civilian nonviolent defense.

Despite the characters' feelings of hope prompted by these listening experiences, it is notable that Walzer's theoretical work and Galloway's novel both end with a look toward a post-conflict future, rather than reaching the successful establishment of peace. We may read these endings as an implication of the impossibility of such a venture, or we may consider these endings optimistically, as a statement that a peaceful reality has only yet to be fully realized. Both texts do end by looking forwards hopefully, however, and in *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, this world is reached with the help of music, and of music remembered, an idea established in the final sentences of the novel: "She closes her eyes, recalls the notes she heard only yesterday, a melody that is no longer there but feels very close" (Galloway, 2009: 223). Arrow, Kenan, and Dragan are individuals who are influenced by the nonviolent defensive act of a fellow civilian, the cellist, to work at maintaining elements of civilization in Sarajevo in nonviolent ways. Here, we witness the potential hope of music, but also the potential over-idealization: there are clear resonances here of the idea that music offers a path into another world, in this instance, a peaceful, post-conflict world. However, this raises issues concerning the narrative around post-conflict futures, as whether such an ideal can ever exist remains hanging in the unknown place just after the end of the novel.

Conflict transformation in *The Cellist of Sarajevo*

Despite the open-ended endings of Galloway and Walzer, there remain aspects of *The Cellist of Sarajevo* which can aid our understanding of music's impact in a situation of potential conflict transformation, and the move toward a post-conflict future. To illustrate this, I now turn to a ethnomusicological study of the use of music in conflict resolution,

by highlighting key similarities between *The Cellist of Sarajevo* and Robertson's (2010) study of music and conflict transformation in Sarajevo, ending with a consideration of Robertson (2016), a publication which develops his previous research (Robertson, 2010). What makes these similarities particularly striking is the fact that Robertson published his research two years *after* Galloway's novel, demonstrating that Galloway was able to reach his insights into human responses to music in conflict through a creative imagining of the situation, and proving that, as a work of literature, the musico-literary novel can mirror real-life understandings of music's potential power for listeners.

Both texts consider the role of civilians, rather than governments, in exiting violence, and the argument that "cultural movements" at the "community-level [. . .] have a greater chance of success than those that are directed from the top-down" (Robertson, 2010: 50). But while *The Cellist of Sarajevo* features one civilian performer, Robertson's ethnographic study focuses on a group of performers in an inter-religious choir. Both, however, are based in Sarajevo, and Robertson's (2010) topic question, "Can music help to positively transform cultural conflicts and if so how?" (p. 39), speaks to the themes of *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. Robertson (2010) approaches this question from a sociological and ethnomusicological point of view, in his study of the Most Duša choir, which has "an explicit conflict transformation remit" (p. 38).²² Key to Robertson's work is Tia DeNora's (2000), and the "theoretical matrix of music, memory, belief, reality, possibility and identity" (Robertson, 2010: 49).²³

In Robertson (2010), the musical hierarchy of the choir establishes stability for the choir members, recalling their memories of past stability. Similarly, the cellist in Galloway's novel establishes past memories of concert hierarchies of a soloist and audience, as the cellist gives the civilians a place and person of "leadership" to focus on, while providing them with the role of audience and listeners: for example, when two young girls listen to the cellist's performance, and then lay flowers at his feet (2009: 93–94). Using previous studies, Robertson (2010: 50) predicted the need for a feeling of equality in music projects aimed at conflict transformation, but the data collected countered this prediction: it was "surprising to see an unequal hierarchical structure working well [. . .]. It now seems that this is due to Most Duša's desire for stable social identities that they feel are missing in their daily lives" (p. 50). Similar ideas around stable social identities can be found in *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, when Dragan and his friend, Emina, reminisce about conventional ways of acting pleasantly in the society of Sarajevo, and ask, "Isn't that how we're supposed to behave? Isn't that how we used to be?" (Galloway, 2009: 78). Robertson's (2010) study also highlights "the perceived importance of strong charismatic leaders in community music projects" (pp. 48–49) related to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and conflict transformation projects, and the cellist can be read as the strong charismatic leader in the "community project" of *The Cellist of Sarajevo*.

The act of listening to music also recalls memories for the characters in the novel, and for the members of Robertson's (2010) choir: "Members of Most Duša seem to cling to the choir as evidence that life was very different in pre-war Bosnia, coupled with the hope of change for the future" (p. 48). Music is connected with the aim to recall and to reconstruct in Robertson (2010): "Musical meaning and memories reflexively construct themselves and each other" (p. 49). The experience of singing together enables members of Most Duša "to recall and reconstruct their past in order to provide hope for their

future” (Robertson, 2010: 49). The audience is also affected by the listening experience, as they recall memories of pre-war life: “This remembering seems to enable both performers and listeners to imagine and hope for a future when choirs like Most Duša are no longer uncommon” (Robertson, 2010: 49). Robertson’s tied concepts of recalling and reconstructing resonate within Galloway’s novel. As noted earlier, the cellist chooses to play Albinoni’s *Adagio* because of its composition history of reconstructing from fragments; Arrow’s listening experience causes her to recall her past self and reconstruct her future ideal of Sarajevo through nonviolent action; and Kenan watches the city around him heal itself in a vision when he hears the cellist. Even Dragan, who hears of the cellist but never hears his performance firsthand, is prompted to recall and reconstruct his lost city: “He [Dragan] will behave now as he hopes everyone will someday behave. Because civilisation isn’t a thing that you build and then there it is, you have it forever. It needs to be built constantly, recreated daily” (Galloway, 2009: 216).²⁴ Using DeNora’s work, Robertson (2010) identifies that “In the process of remembering, it becomes possible to recreate a sense of co-operation in the future since it can be imagined in the present” (p. 51).²⁵ A limitation of Robertson’s (2010: 51) study is that all audience perceptions are reported from Most Duša choir members, rather than recorded directly from the audience. However, Frith (1996) proposes that “music [. . .] gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it” and, moreover, music is both “an individualizing form” and “obviously collective” (pp. 114, 121).²⁶ Thus, we might read Galloway’s novel as offering an imaginative exploration of an audience’s perception of the listening experience, and of the impact of the active listening experience, as the collective of Sarajevo citizens each have their own active, individual experiences of hearing the cellist’s music.²⁷ Relating to this dynamic of the individual and the collective, Robertson (2010) highlights music’s ability to “trigger” shared memories, encouraging listeners to recall and reconstruct, an ability which is key to his study:

It is these memories rather than the music itself that seem to contain shared values and beliefs. [. . .] It is this process of remembering which seems to provide the members of Most Duša with the motivation for positive conflict transformation and the belief that this transformation is possible. (p. 50)

Robertson (2010) ties music’s “meaning” with its “power” (p. 51), something we also find in *The Cellist of Sarajevo*; by ascribing memories to the music, which become part of its “meaning” for individual listeners, music takes on the power to motivate individuals to attempt to reconstruct their damaged city, moving toward a potential post-conflict future.

Robertson’s (2010) study, which was ongoing at the time of its writing, concludes that the music of the choir has had “a positive effect [. . .] in the context of transforming conflict” (p. 51), as the choir has “afforded its members the ability to engage with identity, emotional, memory and biographical work [. . .] through a reflexive process” (p. 51).²⁸ However, there remain limitations: “Some members [. . .] have pointed out that the choir is not representative of modern BiH [Bosnia-Herzegovina], but of a fantasised past BiH” (Robertson, 2010: 51). For some members, “the musical process of remembering better times in order to recreate them in the future is too slow for the suffering population” (Robertson, 2010: 52), and Robertson’s (2010) study ends, like Galloway and Walzer’s,

looking into the future: “It remains to be seen if this belief in the possibility of a more positive future, as propagated through the Most Duša choir, can result in a reality” (p. 52). All three texts thus end by placing the post-conflict setting in the (as yet) unreached future. However, Robertson (2016) re-focuses this open-endedness into a new direction. Arguing for an allegorical way of thinking about “music as ethnography,” and ethnography as music (Robertson, 2016: 254), the conclusions of Robertson (2016) explain the open-ended theme of the post-conflict narrative: “Current world structures [. . .] favor short-term concrete objectives over long-term emerging processes” (p. 263). A long-term reflexive process of using music in conflict transformation, as Robertson (2016) argues for, has yet to be fully realized due to funding restraints (p. 263); in other words, the requirement for “specified outcomes” and quick solutions is counter to what Robertson argues is needed in order to achieve long-term conflict resolutions and post-conflict settings. In view of this, “if music and conflict transformation is to move away from the theoretically possible toward the practically achievable, then the way in which support is provided [. . .] needs to be drastically rethought” (Robertson, 2016: 263). Most importantly, Robertson (2016) argues that, when musicians use their art to promote peace, these musicians help “to propagate the belief in the power of music, until which time the structures may change to allow music’s full potential to be realized” (pp. 263–264). If “belief systems strongly influence behaviours” (Robertson, 2016: 259), as Robertson argues, then *The Cellist of Sarajevo* is an example of how musico-literary novels can further help to propagate the belief in the power of music, a power which results not in idealized understandings of music and impossible post-conflict aims, but in positive outcomes from having such beliefs in the medium of music, and the power it might hold in aiding the attempt to exit violence.

Conclusion

When considering *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, we must not forget the questionable ethics behind Galloway’s use of Vedran Smailović as inspiration, and while it is common for writers to use real-life events in their writing, it is easy for readers to conflate Galloway’s cellist with Smailović. However, Galloway primarily focuses on imagining the cellist’s audience, establishing the experience of listening to sound and music as significant elements of the novel. In its consistent thematic focus on the music-listening experience, *The Cellist of Sarajevo* is a musico-literary novel, one which requires an interdisciplinary approach, and this article is one example of how such an approach might be achieved. Thus, in the first section, I identified the significance of active listening in *The Cellist of Sarajevo* by applying theories on the soundscape of the novel. In the second section, I developed the idea of the active listening experience by paralleling Arrow’s internal moral debates with Walzer’s just war theory, demonstrating how music can be understood to be a potential moral influencer through active listening. In the third and final section, I highlighted the striking similarities between Robertson’s (2010) ideas and Galloway’s novel, demonstrating how the musico-literary novel can reach similar conclusions to that of ethnographic studies. A final striking similarity between these interdisciplinary texts becomes clear only now in the conclusion, as the endings of the three key texts (the novel, the just war theory, and the ethnographic conflict resolution study) provide an open comment on the (im)possibility of music’s potential to motivate

the move toward a post-conflict future. It is an open ending which this article, too, will leave, as we await future research in this vital area. I end on a hopeful note, however, by considering Frith's (1996) proposition that "music gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be" (p. 123).²⁹ The ideal may not have been reached outside of music yet, but it may yet be reached, if we continue to be aided by the enigmatic experience that is music listening; and by analyzing musico-literary novels like *The Cellist of Sarajevo* in detail, and from an interdisciplinary perspective, we get ever-closer to an understanding of the ways in which music might play a part in attempts to exit violence.

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Notes

1. The siege was part of the Bosnian conflict. For more context, see Gallagher (2003).
2. See Burns (1992); Wellburn (2002).
3. Galloway's novel is named in Kristen Renwick Monroe et al.'s (2014) list of novels exploring humanity in war; Georgiana Banita (2010) considers Galloway as part of a wider group of Bosnia-centered Canadian fiction; Michelle Forrest (2011) notes Galloway as a text inspired by Smailović but she also, highly questionably, uses the novel as a historical source for context on Albinoni's *Adagio*.
4. In 1992, Brabant interviewed Smailović and recorded Smailović's performance, snippets of which can be heard in Lunt (2014).
5. The afterword notes, "For necessity's sake I have compressed three years into under a month. I hope, however, that the spirit of the book is true" (Galloway, 2009: 226).
6. Arrow is also inspired by a real person: "The name Arrow comes from a Radio Denmark documentary entitled *Sniper*. A female sniper named Arrow (*Strijela*) was interviewed for the program, though very little information was given about her. I tried to locate her but failed. [. . .] In any case the character of Arrow in this novel is my own invention" (Galloway, 2009: 225–226).
7. In his clarification of the concept of "musicalized" fiction, Wolf (1999) writes that "the integration of music into literature in the mode of explicit 'telling' or thematization, is not in itself counted as a musicalizing device" (pp. 231–232).
8. This is distinct from Gerry Smyth's (2008) "music-novel," which is much broader in scope.
9. I have identified a number of musico-literary novels. Benson (2006) and Smith (2016) have written on *An Equal Music* (Seth, 1999), which fits my classification. Other examples include *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (Thien, 2016), *Orfeo* (Powers, 2014), *The Noise of Time* (Barnes, 2017), to name a few.

10. For a wider overview, see Bergh and Sloboda (2010): a review of the research developments in the use of music and art in conflict transformation up until 2010.
11. I focus on sound in relation to the senses. For more on the sensual consideration of sound, see Pinch and Bijsterveld (2011).
12. It is near-impossible to ignore the striking similarities between Galloway's opening lines and those of *Gravity's Rainbow* (Pynchon, 2013), first published in 1973, though Thomas Pynchon's (2013) novel is not explicitly named in Galloway's: "A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now" (p. 3). Pynchon's (2013) novel is concerned with the delay between the sight and sound of a rocket-bomb: "He won't hear the thing come in. It travels faster than the speed of sound. The first news you get of it is the blast. Then, if you're still around, you hear the sound of it coming in" (p. 8).
13. Galloway's description of the cellist guiding the bow to the cello's "throat" has a striking element of erotic violence—a use of language which is not used again toward the cellist or music; perhaps, this first and last violent description of the cello marks the point where violent sound is turned into music. From a practical perspective, it is unclear where the "throat" of a cello would be, but it is possible that Galloway is extending the metaphor of the cello's "neck" to make the bridge (to which the bow should be near) its "throat."
14. Simon Frith (1996) highlights how, often, music and the musical experience are not distinguished as separate: "[W]e hear the music as authentic (or rather, we describe the musical experience we value in terms of authenticity) and such a response is then read back, spuriously, on to the music-making (or listening) process" (p. 121).
15. I am understanding power as potential; more specifically in this context, the potential for positive change in a conflict context. For a detailed overview on the various ways of defining, theorizing, and conceptualizing "power," see Hearn (2012).
16. For more on active listening and the role of the music listener, see Evans (1990); DeNora (2000); Born (2005).
17. The piece's popularity is demonstrated in its inclusion in multiple film soundtracks, including *Gallipoli* (Weir, 2001) and *Manchester by the Sea* (Loneragan, 2017).
18. We must remember not to confuse Galloway's fictional reasoning for the cellist's deliberate performance of Albinoni's *Adagio* with that of Smailović, for whom it was more spontaneous and emotional: "At some moment, I [Smailović] recognised that the music, pouring from me like my tears, was Albinoni's *Adagio* [. . .], the saddest, saddest music I know" (Smailovic and Sands, 1999).
19. In a similar vein, Petermann (2014) examines how the legend of Bach's composition of the *Goldberg Variations* is used for thematic and structural models in certain novels.
20. For support and criticism of Walzer, see Orend (2000a, 2000b), Parsons (2012), Nardin (2013).
21. See Nardin (2013) for a discussion on Walzer's work as a political rather than philosophical argument.
22. In Robertson (2010), the choir's name is changed to Most Duša to maintain privacy, but in Robertson (2016), it is identified as the Pontanima choir.
23. See DeNora (2000: 20, 146).
24. Repetition is tied to concepts of "civilization" in Galloway's novel, as this quotation illustrates. Repetition, like the repeated performance of the cellist, offers stability, and therefore hope, hence Dragan's realization that civilization must be "recreated daily." He demonstrates the practical actions of his new resolution a few pages later: "Dragan smiles as he passes by an elderly man. The man doesn't meet his gaze, keeps his eyes on the ground. 'Good afternoon,' Dragan says, his voice bright. The man looks up. He seems surprised. 'Good afternoon,' Dragan repeats. The man nods, smiles, and wishes him the same" (Galloway, 2009: 218).
25. See DeNora (2000: 65–66).

26. Frith's (1996) main argument is about the self in process: "My argument here, in short, rests on two premises: first, that identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, that our experience of music—of music and music listening—is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*." (p. 109)
27. For a discussion on the potential empathic capacity of music in conflict, and a working definition of empathy in this context, see Laurence (2008).
28. See also DeNora (2000: 45–47).
29. Frith (1996) makes this claim because: "if musical identity is [. . .] always fantastic, idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits, it is, second, always also real, enacted in musical activities. Music making and music listening, that is to say, are bodily matters." (p. 123)

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